

YEARS IN SOLITARY**Freed American
Retained Hope**

PHILADELPHIA (AP) —

An Army civilian employee who spent 19 years in a Chinese prison said today he "never gave up hope of getting out."

"I was in solitary the first three years and the last five or six years," in Peking, Richard G. Fecteau, 43, of Lynn, Mass., told newsmen in his first interview since his release Monday in Hong Kong.

Mary Ann Harbert, 25, of Palo Alto, Calif., a Chinese prisoner for more than three years, was released at the same time.

Fecteau and Miss Harbert are undergoing extensive medical tests at the nearby Valley Forge Medical Center and Hospital.

Fecteau, clad in blue military hospital pajamas and bedroom slippers, stood in front of a Christmas tree and told newsmen his trial by the Chinese on spy charges lasted about an hour.

Fecteau said that, for the most part, he was able to keep



RICHARD G. FECTEAU

abreast of the news happenings in the world by reading the English-language Peking Review.

He said he knew that America
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Release: Fecteau 'Never Gave Up Hope'

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cans had walked on the moon and that President Nixon was planning to visit China.

"I think that visit is important," he said. "It will help ease relations between our countries."

Fecteau said he was told only Thursday that he would be freed when he was taken before a military tribunal in Peking. He said he spent most his years in prison in the Chinese capital.

Surprised at Release

Fecteau, described by hospital authorities as withdrawn and cautious after his ordeal, said "It was a surprise to be released."

"I thought I would have to do another year," he said.

He declined to answer specific questions about his capture and his years in prison and prefaced the news confer-

ence by telling newsmen "I don't want to be interviewed."

"I am in good health and I want to see my family," he said. "I don't want to talk to newsmen because I have been so long in solitary confinement. You can get used to that, but that's one of my problems now. I was alone so long."

Well Treated

He said the Chinese treated him well, except for the solitary, and that three Chinese shared his cell at various times during his imprisonment.

"One was a colonel, one had been an interpreter for the Japanese and one was charged with espionage," he said.

He said his cell block was occupied by the other Americans known to be imprisoned in China, including John T. Downey, 41, of New Britain, Conn., who was aboard the plane with Fecteau

when it was shot down over China on a flight from Japan to Korea in 1952, during the Korean war.

Downey, sentenced to life, has had his sentence commuted to five years, effective with the date of commutation, believed to be recently.

In Washington, United Press International reported, administration officials said they hoped three other Americans held in China may be released in connection with Nixon's trip to Peking. They were identified as Downey; Air Force Capt. Philip Smith, 37, and Navy Lt. Robert J. Flynn.

Status Still Mystery

An air of mystery still hangs over the circumstances of the capture of Fecteau and Downey.

The official version is that they were civilian employees of

the U.S. Army and that their aircraft was forced down on Chinese territory during a flight from Korea to Japan.

The unofficial story says they were employees of the Central Intelligence Agency whose mission it was to organize agents in Manchuria and that they were surprised by Chinese agents during a secret flight to Chinese territory in November 1952.

Miss Harbert was captured in April 1968, when a yacht she was on was seized on a cruise between Hong Kong and Japan. She was believed dead since there was no report on her capture.

Informed by Kissinger

In Lynn, Fecteau's father, Philip, 73, disclosed that presidential aide Henry Kissinger told the parents Saturday their son would be released, but asked that they keep the news to themselves.

Kissinger and Nixon "worked extra hard on this and when Mr. Kissinger was in China, he took direct action to have Dick freed," Fecteau said.

U.S. officials declined yesterday to concede that Fecteau was on an espionage mission, but it was learned they no longer deny the charges.

Expressing reluctance to talk about "so damned sensitive a matter," government sources nevertheless said "we are not arguing" anymore with the Chinese who insist that Fecteau and Downey were engaged in espionage.

Ex-Wife Denies Report

And Fecteau's ex-wife denied yesterday she had said he was a spy.

"Don't listen to it," Mrs. Margaret Fecteau said of a published report quoting her as saying "the Red Chinese haven't been lying" when they claimed Fecteau was a spy.